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*Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)*

Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*, 51

PROLOGUE

The United States is no longer a young nation. No longer can Americans shrug off their country's internal conflicts or rationalize the failures of their government by saying "This is a new nation." American society has now reached the point that marks a people in middle passage. The early goals have been achieved; the future goals are but dimly seen.

Seldom has a nation been so fortunate, so shielded from foreign wars through the years of its youth—free to make mistakes and to commit so much of its wealth to internal improvements. Seldom has a nation been so wealthy, so endowed with precisely those natural resources that the various stages of its growth persistently demanded, or so blessed with space into which to move, to experiment, and to begin life anew.

As each American reads history and attempts to place himself within space and time, he must ask himself to what or to whom he should give his ultimate loyalty. To himself? To his family? To his ethnic, religious, or professional group? To his generation? To his nation? To mankind as a whole? To an ideal? Out of the conflict of loyalties within an individual arise the same tensions—producing vigorous response and immense achievement as well as indecision, despair, and useless anger—that arise in nations.

The United States was created out of conflicting loyalties and tension. Tension is still a dynamic force in American society, but the causes have changed. Great mobility and the communication media allow few parts of the United States to remain unseen and few aspects of American society—whether they be admirable or ugly—to go unnoticed. Today's instant communication brings Americans together as never before, but hate and violence along with love and goodwill can be transmitted.

If the tensions in the nation are to work toward the creation of a healthy, mature social order, American society must remain open to new ideas and thoughts. In this open society Americans need to be free to make mistakes, to be fools, to say the unpopular, to venture to the frontiers of knowledge. But they must also have a sense of responsibility and an awareness of their debt to the past for bequeathing them an open society.

America—the America of the future—can be better than the America of the past. To make it so, Americans must embrace change, continually reassess goals, and channel those changes and pursue those goals according to what they have learned from the past. It is the hope of the authors that this book will assist in that process.